

State Senator Robert Mayer The Mayer Memo

Senator Robert Mayer - Serving Butler, Dunklin, New Madrid, Pemiscot, Ripley, Stoddard & Wayne Counties



Column For The Week Of: February 19, 2010

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An Open Letter to Educators Regarding the “Open Enrollment Bill”

Dear Educator:

Education has been a top priority of mine during my tenure in the Missouri General Assembly. I sincerely admire your profession and appreciate your service educating Missouri’s youth. Knowing that, I hope you will afford me this opportunity to address some concerns that have been brought forth by some of your colleagues pertaining to [Senate Bill 603](#), otherwise known as the “Open Enrollment Bill.” The most common of these concerns include the reason for this bill, athletics, overcrowding, special education, transfer timing and funding.

I sponsored SB603 as a response to an increasing amount of reports from parents throughout our state requesting changes in enrollment policy. In one such instance, parents had appealed up to the Missouri Board of Education for the reassignment of their two young children. These children were riding school buses daily in excess of one hour each way along windy lake roads to attend a school in their assigned district. However, the adjoining school district carried the name of the town in which they resided. In addition, the route to the adjoining district’s school largely avoided the curvy lake roads and was only fifteen to twenty minutes away.

“Open enrollment” imposes no change on athletics. Missouri high school athletics would continue to be governed by the Missouri State High School Activities Association. Any high school athlete that transfers, under MSHSAA, is ineligible to compete for one year, which is consistent with current MSHAA rules.

A study was recently prepared for the General Assembly by the Joint Committee on Education in December of last year entitled, “Open Enrollment States: Policies and Practices.” This study found that participation rates among students in other “open enrollment” states hovered around the five percent mark. We do not envision a mass exodus of students from one district to another. In addition to the low participation rates found in states that participate in this program, SB 603 carries a number of safeguards to protect against overcrowding, one of which allows each school district to limit classroom sizes and student-to-teacher ratios. If these ratios would be met or exceeded, the “receiving” school district need not accept the transfer. Also, we do not require the “receiving” school district to provide transportation outside of their district. It would be the duty of the parent or guardian to provide any “additional” transportation required.

Senate Bill 603 was also drafted in a manner cognizant of special education concerns, acutely aware of both the needs of the children and the additional costs of the district. For students receiving special education services, a request to enroll in another district will only be approved if the receiving district maintains a special education program appropriate for the child.

The “Open Enrollment Bill” requires parents to send notification to the desired “receiving” district by January 15 of the preceding school year of the intent to transfer. Any requests after this date would be subject to approval by the board of education. This would prevent untimely transfers and unexpected infusion of students.

With regard to funding, I am working on a provision to incorporate into our bill that would minimize disruption to each school district’s per pupil expenditure. I will work to ensure that this bill funds participating student’s education with district’s interests in mind as well.

I am grateful for this opportunity to clarify my genuine intentions to better our Missouri schools. Whether it is “Open Enrollment” or working with my colleagues in the Missouri Senate in an attempt to fully fund the K-12 foundation formula, I understand the importance of the investment in Missouri’s youth and education. Please don’t hesitate to contact my office with any questions or concerns.

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Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Robert N. Mayer".